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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses problems and offers suggestions related to mainstreaming hearing impaired students into composition classes. The minimum language proficiency necessary to mainstream a student is described first, followed by the recommended procedure to actually move a hearing impaired student into a regular composition classroom. Listed among the problems that accompany such a move are: (1) both American Sign Language (ASL) and signed English need to be used, (2) materials need to be adapted, (3) students need to be encouraged to write more than one or two sentences, and (4) teachers need to be aware of the students' often severely limited life experiences. The differences between English and ASL and between ASL and signed English are discussed, examples of deficient life experiences are presented (including the students' lack of sensitivity to family environment and to the concept of choice), and the benefits of using English as a second language materials are explained. The need to prepare students for mainstreaming is emphasized, as is the necessity for teachers of mainstreamed hearing impaired students to maintain their usual standards of student performance. (AEA)

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"The Mainstream Hearing Impaired Student in College Composition Classes"

Let me start off by giving you a little background on what I am doing in the area of language arts for the deaf. At Pima College, in Tucson, I am currently responsible for the development and instruction of courses in writing, reading, vocabulary, career exploration, study skills and personal development skills. These courses are self-contained for the deaf, and parallel existing developmental courses in each of these areas. The rationale for these courses is to give the deaf as optimum an evironment as possible, preparing each student to become mainstreamed. Pima College is a multi-campus, open admissions insitution -- which results in having many entering students from pre-reading skills to those at a sixth or seventh grade level. Any student who has developed at or above the seventh grade level is thought to have the necessary language skills to be mainstreamed into one of the regular courses. This applies not only to specific composition and language arts courses, but to most vocational courses as well. It is usually a frustrating and unsuccessful academic experience, even in vocational courses, unless the individual is adequately prepared in basic reading and writing skills. About fifty percent of the deaf students I work with do not take further composition or reading courses, but go directly into vocational programs. This of course, depends upon the nature of the programs and the course work involved.

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Upon entry into the program, each deaf student is given a diagnostic evaluation in English as well as sign language. Although related, one does not necessarily determine the other. Materials are then adapted to fit the particular individualized curriculum designed for the student. Within these self-contained classes, signed English is used as much as possible. But this is flexible, particularly at the developmental level. In these courses, it is my goal to give both the required conceptual information, as well as adequate preparation to compete in a mainstreamed environment. This mandates the use of both American Sign Language and Signed English. A little later, I can mention some specific differences between these two languages as they might relate to your composition classes.

In addition to developing communication skills and vocabulary, both in English and in sign language, adaptations in materials are par for the course. This requires screening materials for appropriate language level as well as appropriate experiences. A little more on this later also. As each student becomes more skilled and more independent, the job of adapting becomes easier.

In tackling the problem of longer writing exercises , one of the most successful methods I have used is journal writing. This enables the student to develop composition skills on a familiar and concrete level, before proceeding to more abstract and less familiar territory. Students who normally have responded with one or two sentences to fairly stimulating topics, have written several paragraphs describing their day to day experiences. As will be shown later, this is very valuable information for an instructor. After eight years of teaching the deaf, there are

still daily surprises in discovering a deaf student's experiences or lack of them. These gaps can range from the trivial to the significant. Last Friday, through these journals, I discovered that only one out of twenty students in one class were aware that men's and women's shirts differed -- which side the buttons were on. On Monday, I discovered that most students were unaware of what a television weatherman was doing. Most had pieced together the visual clues -- maps, numbers, -- but very few had figured out the real purpose.

Experiential deficits can be as serious a barrier to the deaf individual as his language handicaps. I emphasize this, because I feel that any instructor's ability to relate information to a student can be seriously impaired if he or she assumes certain shared experiences. This does not mean to go out and confine the deaf student only to those experiences which he brings into a classroom. It does, however, suggest a more gradual approach as well as a sensitivity to possible gaps particularly when working with an individual student.

People often ask me how long it takes to fully understand and use sign language. The National Registry of Interpreters has recently established a minimum of from three to five years of usage before you can take the national certification exams. Yet this is often only the beginning. Probably more than any other language, there is a wide variation between using and understanding sign language. This is because the individual variations of the expressive use of signs is very great. The fluidity, patterns and even individual signs is as distinctive as the voice print.

I point this out because I feel it is important to keep individual variations in mind when one begins to generalize about the nature of sign language as it relates to the English language. The handouts I have brought with me illustrate some of the more common difficulites for somone learning English, coming primarily from a sign language base. Briefly, then, let me outline some of the specific differences. First, it is important to remember that sign language structure and vocabulary have no real correlation to the English language itself. For example, the sign for "family" has no correlation to the English language equivalent, F A M I L Y, unless the individual has learned it. Many assumptions are made without fully realizing this.

In sign language, punctuation does not exist; hence the notion of a sentence or isolated complete throught is foreign to sign language. Communication in sign language, whether brief or lengthy, is told in its entirety. There is a parallel to the difference between written and spoken English. In sign language, the differences are much greater.

If it were possible to isolate a group of signs and label them "a sentence", you would find the structure distinct from English. Characteristics of American Sign Language (as they relate to learned English):

- There is no real correlation between English and words and American Sign Language words unless it is learned.
- There is no punctuation in sign language.
- There are no articles.
- Adjuctives normally are preceded by a noun (i.e., man old fat to store walked).

- There is no passive voice in sign language. A frequent mistake found is a confusion between passive voice and past tense (i.e., The man was walked to the store).
- Tense formation is non-existent. Verbs take their tense from context (i.e., Yesterday, the man walk. Today, the man walk. Tomorrow, the the man walk.)
- Plurals are not formed by using "s" or by spelling changes, but by a repetition of the sign.
- Questions are fundamentally different from English. Normally, the interrogative pronoun is the final word. (i.e., took my book who?)
- Relative pronouns are never used. A sentence such as "I saw the man who took my book: is often interpreted as a question.
- Prepositions are seldom used. Normally connectors in sign language are made by directional relationship between the signs.
- Auxiliary verbs are rarely used.
- There is no lining verb in American Sign Language.

Equally significant deficits which are often underestimated or overlooked when discussion the deaf are experience deficits. This can play a tremendous role in successfully working with these students. Because most of you will be working through an interpreter, there is less opportunity for immediate feedback to catch these gaps. Restricted by poor communication skills, low reading

ability, lack of auditory information, the deaf individual often emerges into society without being adequately prepared. Institutional settings, while beneficial in communicating basic information, often leave the deaf individual dependent and lacking many decision making skills. The following examples are generalizations, but they do suggest some of the areas of deficit:

-Family. Traditionally, due to communication barriers and residential schooling, very little information or sensitivity to the family environment is present. Out of a total of 36 deaf students this semester, one student can communicate fluently with her parents.

-Choice itself is a new experience for those students accustomed to a regimented life.

-History. In addition to the barriers of reading skills and a lack of auditory information, sign language is an extremely concrete language. It focuses upon immediate events and people involved. Normally, there are no signs for "he", "she", other than pointing to the referent.

-Politics. Information or comprehension beyond who is President usually escapes young deaf students. Terms such as mayor, governor, senator, congress, representatives have neither meaning nor faces to attach to them.

- Careers. The concept of careers, or more correctly, jobs, is restricted to those of first hand experience, or those of peers. Under-employment has further restricted the range of career possibilities.

-Lack of other deaf individuals or experiences to relate to. Even in books specifically written for the deaf, this is overlooked.

Presented with these two major deficits -- language and experience, as a Special Education teacher, I am confronted with a third deficit - materials. Even though I have a specified population to instruct, I am still faced with adaptation of materials and flexibility of methods. Although some materials have been developed for a deaf population, most ignore the experiential deficits. Further, most of these materials are designed to address grammatical constructions rather than the writing process. At present, I haven't found any materials which I can use without adapting. Probably the best materials which I have found have come from an ESL base. This seems to fit best with a consideration for the deaf student's primary language base -- sign language. This concept -- even in deaf education -- is a very recent phenomenon. Until recently, most teachers in deaf education not only knew minimal sign language, if any, but totally ignored sign language in developing and implementing a language arts curriculum. This approach may eventually better prepare a deaf student before entering your classroom.

This might be a good time to briefly describe the two major languages an interpreter might use in a classroom setting. Let me preface this by stating that I strongly support the use of an interpreter in the classroom. While writing between instructor and student can provide some excellent reinforcement and give the instructor immediate feedback, on the whole this is neither practical nor satisfying. If an interpreter uses American Sign Language (the language used by the deaf) the student stands a much better chance of comprehension. Yet using their interpretation often loses key phrases or vocabulary. This can later surface in

problems with text materials or on tests. The other option is Signed English (an artifically structured sign language which parallels English). By using signed English, you are less likely to lose specific phrasing or vocabulary, but you risk questionable comprehension. In signed English, you are much more dependent on the deaf individual's familiarity with standard English. It would be similar to reading, not listening to, whatever is said in the classroom. These two systems are not exclusive, and depending on the student, can be used in varying combinations. By discussing the pro and cons, student, instructor, and interpreter can decide which system to emphasize in the classroom.

In addition to working on language arts, I spend considerable time preparing students to become mainstreamed. This includes familiarizing the student with the support system of interpreter, notetaker and possible tutor. It also includes discussing the pros and cons of each sign language system. As someone on the inside track of special education, I want to stress that I do not support universal, blanket mainstreaming. I make specific assessments and recommendations as to a potential student's feasibility to be mainstreamed. Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, these recommendations are not always followed. Feasibility does not mean that the student will not require any modifications or adaptations. I am still involved with many students who are mainstreamed -- as faculty consultant, tutor, or in language reduction. But feasibility does not indicate, to me at least, that the potential for success in a regular classroom is there. It is up tc each instructor to decide the amount of time and energy he or she is willing to devote. I want

to emphasize that adaptation does not mean lowering standards. The standards which you set for your class should not be changed -- attendance, assignments, projects. The quality of work is something which you must assess individually. If the focus is on helping students write correct sentences, papagraphs or essays, whatever methods and materials you have can be adapted. The bottom line in all of this is that no one expects you, or any instructor to sacrifice the rest of his class for one or two individuals. This mistaken concept of mainstreaming is counter-productive. But there are many deaf, and disabled students, who can successfully be mainstreamed with a minimum of modification on your part. Keeping in mind the previously mentioned deficits, and working with the supportive services of interpreter, notetaker, and tutor, you an make the composition class an enriching and successful experience for both student and instructor.